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Turncoat to Tell Story on TV

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TV and Radio Editor

Lowell Denver Skinner, 32, the disillusioned Korean War turncoat who returned to this country last week from Red China, has told his story exclusively before the cameras of the Metromedia stations (WNEW-TV, Channel 5, in New York) for a two-hour telecast to be aired Sunday night at 9 o'clock.

The interview was conducted by David Schoenbrun, who recently resigned as chief CBS Washington correspondent.

Allen Dulles, former chief of the Central Intelligence Agency, is flying to New York today to tape a sequence for the program in which he will discuss with Schoenbrun the causes and consequences of defections by Skinner and 20 other American GIs in 1954.

Sen. Thomas J. Dodd, D., Conn., chairman of the Senate subcommittee on internal security, also will appear on the telecast.

Schoenbrun and Jack Lynn, vice-president in charge of programming for the Metromedia TV stations, suggested yesterday that the program may raise serious questions as to the legality of "blanket" dishonorable discharges given the 21 turncoats by the then Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson.

Schoenbrun said that the Department of Justice had been unable to find that Skinner had committed treason or any other crime for which he can now be prosecuted for accepting what the government now officially describes as "voluntary non-repatriation."

"Military lawyers at the DOD (Department of Defense) told me," Schoenbrun said, "that the dishonorable discharges were in their opinion illegal because the men were never court-martialed. The late Charlie Wilson simply issued an administrative fiat."

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The Sunday night telecast, however, will be basically an attempt to probe "the anatomy of an American who has turned his back on his country," Schoenbrun explained.

"When a man jumps over the wall in Berlin, he's seeking freedom and he's a hero. When he deserts our side, he's a rat. But you can't have it both ways. We've got to know why these men didn't want to come home. What we are doing here is a laboratory examination of a mind that cracked under pressure."

Schoenbrun pointed out that Skinner is the first GI turncoat to desert the Red cause in the last five years and brought out of China with him unusual "eyewitness" intelligence on conditions behind the Bamboo Curtain.

Of the 21 who chose not to be repatriated, Skinner is the 11th to return home. At the time he chose to stay with the Communists, he contended he was "staying behind to fight for peace."

Schoenbrun's interview with the former corporal from Akron, Ohio, was taped here last Friday afternoon within 24 hours after Skinner reached New York. He has since returned to his parents' home.

Schoenbrun said Dulles had consented to talk on the program about hitherto confidential information that is contained in a chapter of his forthcoming book, "The Craft of Intelligence," to be published in October. The chapter, titled "Volunteers," deals with defectors from the Soviet side.

Lynn said he arranged to bring Skinner here for the TV interview by phoning him from New York. He passed from Red China into Hong Kong on Aug. 1.

The Metromedia official said he had signed Skinner to an exclusive contract for his story "in all media" until 1964. Lynn declined to say how much Skinner was paid beyond the fact he was sent \$1,000 to cover expenses for his trip here.

Schoenbrun was engaged a few days later as "a high-level pro who could dig out a full study" of Skinner's case, Lynn reported.

It will be the former CBS newsman's first TV appearance since he checked out of the network for which he was for many years Paris correspondent. Schoenbrun said the Sunday telecast was a "one shot" and did not portend any continuing assignment for him from Metromedia.

The two-hour program will be repeated next Monday night at 9. It will be shown on the chain's Washington,

D. C., outlet, WTTG, Sunday at 9 p. m. and Monday at 8:30. Other Metromedia Stations, in Los Angeles, Kansas City and elsewhere, will carry the program a week later. The two-hour tape also will be offered for "world-wide syndication," Lynn announced.

Lynn described Skinner as a "nervous, high-strung" and reluctant subject who at first "didn't want to get involved in publicity." He was brought here under an assumed name and registered at two different New York hotels in Lynn's name, to keep him away from competitive media.

Neither Lynn nor Schoenbrun would disclose what Skinner told in the taped interview.

Dulles will come here today from Duck Island, in upstate

New York, where he has been vacationing. He was entreated by Schoenbrun to appear on the program.

Skinner is married to a Chinese girl whom he has been quoted as saying he hopes to bring to this country. His future plans otherwise are undisclosed.

"Fractured Flickers," a half-hour of early day silent films dubbed with improbable modern dialogue, will be seen Sunday evenings at 7:30 on Channel 9 beginning Oct. 6. The host: Hans Conreid.